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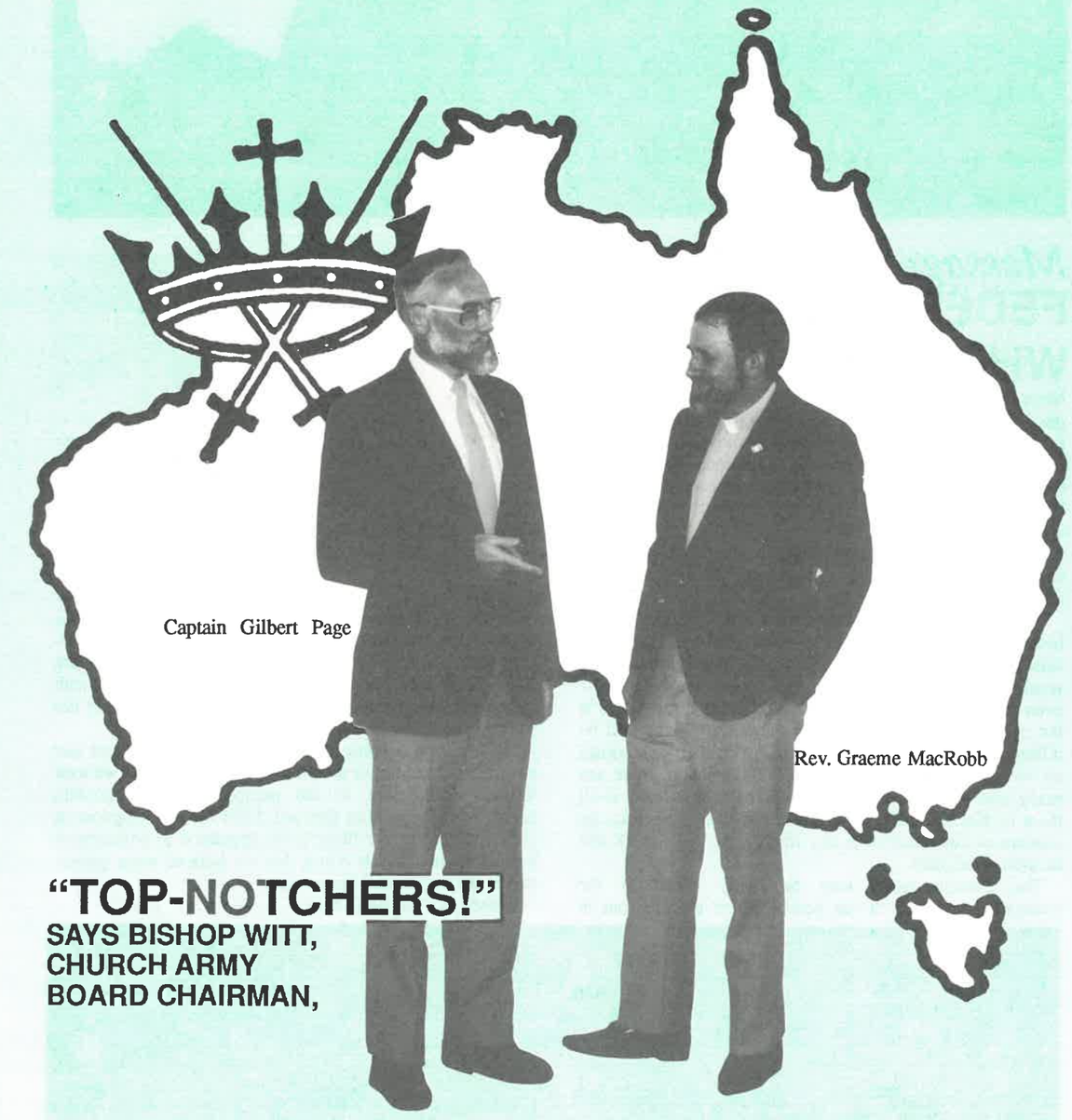

Captain Gilbert Page

Rev. Graeme MacRobb

"TOP-NOTCHERS!"
SAYS BISHOP WITT, CHURCH ARMY BOARD CHAIRMAN,

CHURCH ARMY IN AUSTRALIA
A Society of Evangelists within the Anglican Church

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POINTERS FROM PEOPLE

John and Wendy Capper and family.

I love people—they are great entertainment value! I remember spending the best part of a wet day in Katoomba once, just watching people.

I love biographies. There is a thrill in finding out what makes another person tick, seeing how they handle pressures, pain, successes and failure.

Sometimes as I watch people, or read about them, a small window opens onto myself. I come closer to knowing who I am. I discover feelings I had ignored and hopes I dared not cherish. I am humbled, refreshed or challenged.

My favourite stories are of struggles in faith, of changed lives, of beauty and joy brought out of fear and pain. There is no greater joy than to be with someone in the pain of life, to see the budding of faith, and to share in the joy of commitment. There are few greater challenges to openness to others and trust in God than to see and hear how He has worked in the lives of others.

St. Paul loved telling the story of the Damascus Road; how Jesus came to him and challenged him. He uses his story to point others to the reality of Jesus and the triumph of God's grace.

The great saint, Augustine, told how he was challenged out of a riotous life of drunkenness to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and stop paying attention to your sinful nature and satisfying your desires". (Romans 13:13). Writing his "Confessions" some forty years later Augustine looks back on the change in his life. He sees his encounter with Christ as formative of his Christian life, but never argues it as normative. That is, he sees it as important to how God dealt with him personally but never argued that all should expect the same.

I'm glad I haven't had to have John Newton's experiences before coming to faith. His epitaph read, in part:

"John Newton, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy . . ."

Imagine the cost of all those letters on a headstone! He must have really had something to say . . . As in his hymn, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see . . .

This little glimpse of the lives of the saints is like the sketch we are given in Hebrews Chapter 11—where the faith heroes are paraded—but not for the sake of receiving accolades, but for our sake, so that we might not be "people who turn back and are lost (but) instead might have faith and be saved". (Hebrews 10:39).

So the glimpse we have is not just of another person, or of a part of ourselves, but points us to God, the giver of faith. Then we are given the pointer—beyond the saints .to their Lord and Master.

I read recently how Chuck Colson was challenged by a reading from the work of C. S. Lewis (his "Mere Christianity", in fact). I recalled how Lewis describes the impact of Augustine's Confessions on his own life, how it was St. Paul whose words affected Augustine, and it flashed into my mind how it was the risen Lord himself who had confronted the apostle.

I wonder what challenges people about my life, my living biography? Do they see through me to see more of Jesus, my Lord and Master? Am I a pointer to the Saviour whom I serve? What about you?

And do we praise Him for His faithful people in every age and thank Him that we will be joined with them and with Him in eternity? I hope so!

John Capper.

Rev. John Capper is the Vicar of the Anglican Parish of Collarenebri. He is married to Sister Wendy Capper, C.A. and they have three young children.

HOW HIGH?

Graeme and Sue Liersch with daughter Jessica.

"It was a Saturday night when I met him. I was staying at a friend's place," says Captain Graeme Liersch, C.A., Parish Evangelist at St. John's, Coffs Harbour on the north coast of N.S.W. "Just as I was about to slide into my sleeping bag, the Lord spoke to me, loud and clear! He'd been working in my life for years. I'd been brought up in a Christian home, confirmed, and up until joining R.A.A.F., had been a steady Church goer. Like many young men on leaving home I started to live it up, and turn away from God. Yet about the time of my encounter with him, I had been conscious of some sort of change, or need for change, it's hard to explain. I'd started reading my Bible again, sort of hedging my bets, playing safe.

Now the Lord was calling me, I responded there and then, there was no turning back, I committed my life to Him. Since then, one way or another, I've been an evangelist, wanting to share Jesus Christ with others."

In 1982 Graeme, a Radio-Technician in the R.A.A.F., was stationed in Perth. A Church Army deputation team visited the local Church. The main speaker was Church Army flying evangelist, Captain Kevin Cullen. His message and his mode of ministry triggered a response in Graeme. Once again he was being challenged by the Lord. Due to sign up for a further stint with the R.A.A.F., decisions had to be made. Three days later, again the Lord spoke. "Listen Graeme, this is what I want you to do." . . .

Graeme applied for training with the Church Army. Then the R.A.A.F. transferred him back to Sydney (nearer to the C.A. College?). His official discharge from the R.A.A.F. was on the day he commenced his two-year training course with Church Army.

Married to Sue whom he met in weekend parish work while at College, they now have a one-year-old daughter, Jessica.

Graeme and Sue both enjoy music. Graeme plays piano and saxaphone, and being from west Victoria, he's a keen V.F.L. (Aussie Rules) fan. Sue loves singing. They both see themselves as communicators, and feel the Lord is leading them into more of a counselling ministry.

By profession, Sue is an occupational therapist, very people-oriented. Graeme is an amateur radio operator and recently fulfilled a life-long ambition when he gained a pilot's licence for light aircraft.

Now as they prepare to leave Coffs Harbour at the end of the year, they await the Lord's calling to only He knows where.

As Graeme has been heard to say, "When the Lord says, GO!, you GO! When He says, JUMP!, you say, how high?"

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DREAMS AND VISIONS

"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions." (Joel 2:28).

THE CHALLENGE

Two of the most significant turning points in my life happened in 1959 and 1963. In 1959 I was longing to be involved in full-time ministry. Most doors seemed closed to me because of a very limited education and a poor self-concept of my own academic ability. At that time I took a short-term job at St Mary's Children's Village, Alice Springs, caring for Aboriginal children. My boss was Captain Colin Steep (C.A.) who challenged me to think big and helped me to see the possibilities of becoming an Evangelist with Church Army.

THE VISION

In 1963 after training and a short time on a Mission Caravan in small rural and outback towns, I was moved to work part-time at the then small C.A. Training College at Croydon and part-time on the National Mission Team. My immediate boss at that time was the Staff Officer, Captain Dick Gwilt, Quite often we would spend time together 'dreaming dreams and seeing visions' of what was possible for the Australian Church Army and especially a vision of a multi-purpose Church Army College and Ministry Centre which would, along with training C.A. Officers, be a laity training centre, a place that provided special courses in ministry skills for clergy, missionaries and lay-people involved in special ministries, a creative centre for the development of resources and programmes for use by the wider church and an in-service support base for our own field-staff scattered throughout Australia.

Above all else it would be a place where 'a different kind of preparation for ministry was offered' based on a concept of shared ministry, the development of the whole person to serve God and a regular relating of theological and educational studies to ministry practice and personal involvement in the real world.

It was this vision that spurred me on to undertake serious theological study and later to pursue post-graduate training in education and pastoral studies.

FIRST STEP

In 1968 the then Federal Secretary, Captain A. W. Batley and Bishop Hume Moir (the Board Chairman) took the first step to our dream becoming a reality. Against almost impossible odds they undertook to purchase land at Belrose and there to build our present multi-purpose Church Army National Centre, which was opened free of debt.

However, by this time both Captain Gwilt and I had left Church Army. The Lord had called Dick to leave the Australian Church Army to become Director of New Zealand Church Army and myself into Holy Orders and parish ministry. AIthough we didn't realise it at the time, this was all a vital part of His plan for our earlier dreams and visions to one day become a reality.

NEXT STEP

By 1973 Captain Gwilt had returned to Australia to lead Church Army and plans were made to take a long hard look

Rev. Graeme and Mrs Jenny MacRobb.

at how future Church Army Officers were being trained and how C.A. could best use its God given asset at Belrose. It was at that time Jenny and I received the exciting invitation 'come back and help us to do a completely new thing.' The Lord was beginning to answer our prayers and step by step made our dream a reality.

LOOKING BACK

After 13 years as College Principal it is both exciting and humbling to see the way that the Lord has guided and shaped the development of the College of Evangelism as a multi-purpose Training College and Ministry Resource Centre. There has been amazing answers to prayer, real miracles and literally hundreds of people used by God to bring us to our present position. Church Army has unlimited potential for further development in these fields.

Now the Lord has clearly said to Jenny and I "The job I gave you is finished and I have new things for you to do. Through scripture he has literally said to myself and others in Church Army" Behold I am doing a new thing . . .

LOOKING FORWARD

We look forward with excitement and anticipation to the next chapter in serving God together and at the same time to seeing even greater things happen with C.A. as God brings new people with their dreams and visions allowing them to be contributors to His wonderful work of mission as He has used us.

Graeme MacRobb.

Editors Note:

It is not surprising that for the past 13 years Graeme has had on the wall of his study at the College, the poster that says "Blessed are those who dream dreams and are willing to pay the price to see them come true."

THE SAME MIXTURE AS BEFORE

Captain Gilbert and Mrs Ruth Page.

In the Pioneer of March 1979 my first article as Director appeared. Now very nearly 10 years later, this Pioneer will carry the last article I shall write in that capacity. As these words are being written. You may understand I am rather mixed up. The "mix" is one made up of sadness and nostalgia, of confident anticipation and yet glad uncertainty. A strange mixture you will agree.

Over the past decade I have seen many changes occur in our Society, as well as in the whole Australian Church. Some areas of ministry have been closed down, whilst new areas have been opened up. It is true that with greater resources, even more work could have been carried out. But it is equally true that our officers have experienced the practical provision of God, and seen many lives changed as people have acknowledged the Lordship of Christ. One of my greatest encouragements is to receive a letter from someone who writes to say "thank you" for the work of a certain Captain or Sister, because through them a person has been blessed. Such letters are not rare. Sometimes I read how faith has been renewed and helped to blossom after years of dryness. Sometimes emotional or physical healing has taken place and broken relationships have been restored. Others have come to realise for the first time that Jesus is the one who brings forgiveness and purpose in life. These stories are exciting—and I know they will continue.

I have no wish to alter what I wrote for Pioneer 10 years ago: "This is an age when it has become fashionable in some quarters to be rather apologetic about holding any belief very strongly. But I believe in evangelism. Wherever there is human need, however that is being experienced, just there the good news of Jesus Christ is relevant and important. There is no such thing as a theology which is divorced from people and their day-to-day lives. Evangelism to me, then, means getting involved in a relationship.

The Church Army officer is firstly one who has experienced the love and transforming power of God in his or her own life. This does not imply the evangelist will never experience doubts or problems. On the contrary, to become involved in a relationship with a God of love means we will be keenly aware of injustice, suffering and tension—and want to be at the very point where these things occur. Because of this our Captains and Sisters must become involved in a relationship with other people—right where they live, work and play. To shout encouragement or good advice from the sidelines just will not do."

My wife and I would like to say how very much we have appreciated the kindness and backing we have experienced from Church Army officers, and our many supporters around Australia. I would urge everyone to continue giving and praying. The vision of our founders and the determination of our present evangelists must, and will be, maintained in an Australia that desperately needs to hear of Jesus Christ.

In February 1989 I will begin a new ministry, which has great potential. On Friday, 10th February, in St. David's Cathedral, Hobart, I am to be commissioned as the Director of the Department of Mission for the diocese of Tasmania. This will involve the strengthening of missionary interest and support at home as well as overseas. Close and regular contact Will be maintained with all parishes in the diocese, especially through youth and Christian education work.

Both Ruth and I would value your prayers as we move and settle into this new and challenging ministry. Will we forget all about Church Army?? Well, what do you think after over 30 years with the Society . . . ?

May God himself richly bless and keep you all. Keep alert for every opportunity to witness to your faith. Keep in touch with those in need. Above all keep close to the Lord Jesus through worship in his Church, study of his word, and regular prayer.

Gilbert A. Page

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TOP-NOTCHERS!

TELL ME, PRAY, WHAT'S WRONG WITH TODAY'S CA? (Church Army)

That is what I was asked the other day. Not in rhyme and rather tersely. There was something 'up' with the Church Army, I was told. Gilbert Page was leaving; so was Graeme MacRobb. Two of the heavies packing their bags and moving out. And they'd done a mighty job. And within a week or so of each other, they resign and decamp.

Why? Has there been disagreement? Jealousy? Suspicion? Was there someone who'd suggested that they should go elsewhere? Well, I could answer the last question.

Yes, there was someone who'd been active in their movements. And that someone was God. In ways that only Gilbert and Graeme can answer Almighty God had tapped them on their shoulders and told them 'OFF!' Graeme goes to a parish in Victoria and Gilbert, when I last heard, was waiting for God to tell him where he had to go. But as we're God's church and Gilbert and Graeme are His servants, they must do what He commands. And that is that.

Well, said my interrogator, you're going to miss them, aren't you? We don't have to be masters of intelligence to know the answer to that. Of course we are going to miss them. They're top-notchers.

I've worked on a mission with Gilbert Page, Graeme MacRobb and Graeme MacRobb's students and a masterly lot they were.

And who was to take their place?

I couldn't answer that.

"So then", said my interrogator, "the Church Army was facing death, disappointment and decay? And there was little hope for the future?"

Yes, and no, I replied.

Of course, with the departure of Gilbert and Graeme, we are facing death and decay. But at the heart of the Christian faith there is death. The sign is the sign of the cross. Jesus Himself was laid in a tomb and a huge stone like a great full stop was placed across the entrance. So much so, that when the women went to anoint His dead body on the first day of the week and found the stone removed, they came to the obvious reason. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have laid Him'.

In other words, someone has stolen his dead body.

But they were wrong. His was not a dead body. He was alive. His body has not been stolen, He was raised.

The old rhythm had been Birth, Life, Death.

Jesus had become part of that rhythm.

He'd been born; He'd lived; He'd died.

Then He transformed that rhythm.

Now that was Birth: Life: Death: LIFE.

And what Gilbert and Graeme and countless others proclaim, what we read in Scripture, I expect to see about me.

I expect to see new life.

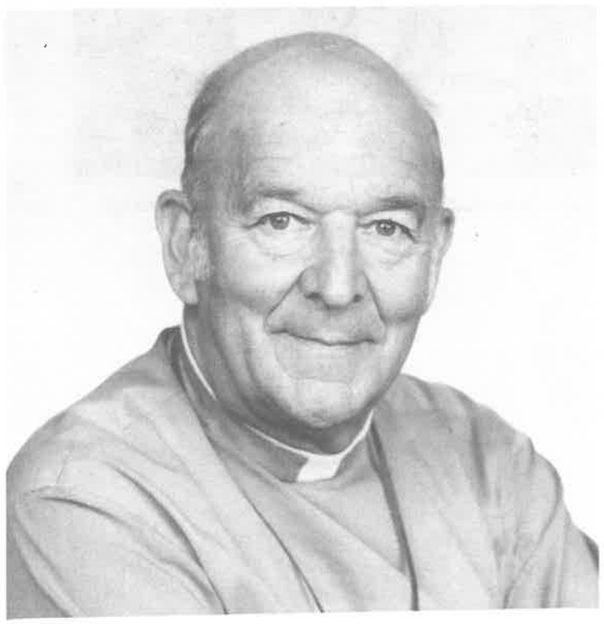
In the Church Army I expect to see new life.

What sort?

I don't know.

But waiting to see what move God will make, I find more than a little exciting.

Howell Bathurst.



Rt. Rev. Howell Witt, Bishop of Bathurst, Chairman of the Church Army Executive Board.

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EDITORIAL
BLACKSTUMP—BEAUT!

I went to the Blackstump with some misgivings. The Blackstump is a Christian three-day (on the October long weekend) Youth Festival organised by Scripture Union (S.U.) with more than "a little help from their friends (of many different denominations).

Many of my fellow mid-50s colleagues suggested I wouldn't survive the weekend and the common catchcry was, "Don't forget to take your ear plugs!" There was to be many Christian rock bands, etc. performing nightly.

My prime purpose for being at Blackstump was to take part in the missions exhibition. Church Army was one of many missions and evangelistic groups invited by S.U. to come to the festival to show the young people the opportunities available in various ministries.

The festival was held at the Boy Scouts Cataract Park, near Appin, 26 kms from Wollongong. Normally it's the venue for the various scout jamborees etc. Blackstumpers, almost 6,000 young people, camped out in tents of all shapes and sizes.

The Missions Exhibition was held in the Commonwealth Bank Building, temporarily called the Lighthouse.

A steady stream of young people visited the exhibition, some just curious, but many eager to serve the Lord in some future full time capacity. Our exhibit (pictured above) received quite a few enquiries and great interest was shown in our work. One aspect was very encouraging. I was often asked if certain officers were still with us and the enquirer would then tell of ministry by that particular officer. Six Church Army College students were at the festival, bringing many other young people with them. Most of the students were Chaplains or Counsellors available for ministry, especially when evangelistic appeals were made at the various happenings.

What of the festival itself? Well, obviously I survived (just). I think I had eight hours sleep the whole weekend, part of my survival was due to sleeping in the exhibition hall (the first time I've slept in a bank). Most of the young people seemed to make do and even thrive on less sleep than I. Don't worry parents, the "raging", as they call it, was what we called high spirited fun. They were very vocal, in fact down right noisy, extremely mobile, constantly on the move between the various events, and definitely demonstrative in all they took part in. They were a beautiful body of young Christian people and we have reason to be very proud of them.

At the various venues and events we had well known speakers like Mal Garvin, of Radio Outreach fame. John Smith, the God Squad bikie, evangelist and modern-day prophet. Fuzz Kitto, the Tasmanian Uniting Church Youth worker, with a great message of hope and encouragement for young people. On stage Shelia Walsh sang, entertained and evangelised, and captured all our hearts (and many souls!!!). Christian rock groups, with the most unbelievable names, Red Rain, Priority Paid, Surprise, etc., etc., etc., kept us all awake and rocking on.

It is true that at times my old ears were assaulted with seemingly slabs of sound which made me retreat to the hill (main events were held outdoors), but above all the electrical instrumental clamour the musicians and singers proclaimed the Gospel message and there's no doubt it is one certain way to reach young people.

Church Army Exhibit at Blackstump.

In the afternoons in Seminarland, seminars on virtually every Christian topic, plus other related ones, were held, led by speakers, musicians, artists, teachers, missionaries, actors, potters, you name them, they were there. All sorts of ideas, ways and presentations helpful in ministry were featured and well attended. It was a very worthwhile and inspiring weekend, and I for one hope to be at the next Blackstump. For me personally, the most inspiring event occurred just prior to leaving. I was in one of the bathrooms, these are canvas and metal pipe structures ideal for camping areas, and also ideal for eavesdropping. I was brushing my teeth, over the canvas wall in the two adjoining separate shower "recesses" two young men were showering. I could clearly hear one of them ministering to the other, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. It was incredible, the water was cold (due to a break down) and here was this young bloke leading the other to the Lord. The last I heard, (and by this time I'd almost brushed my teeth loose) was, one of them saying, "Let's get out and dried". I'm sure it was the water, not the Word that was worrying him.

This small incident highlights what the weekend was all about. Many young people were reached and consequently made commitments turning their lives over to Jesus Christ.

Congratulations S.U. and the other organisers. It was as you had promised and advertised—beaut!

Wal Spencer.

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